CONSTRUCTING "THE OTHER": ETHNO-RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN SEPARATIST MOVEMENTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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OVERVIEW

In Southeast Asia, three main separatist minorities are often studied: the Moros of the southern Philippines, the Acehenese on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia, and the Thai-Malay Muslims in southern Thailand. Their persisting grievances and pursuits of self-determination include disputes over ancestral land, socio-economic opportunity, and exclusion from participation in and lack of recognition by the state apparatus. Consequently, members within these minority groups often take up arms against the state.

Understanding separatist movements in Southeast Asia is more than recognizing political and socio-economic grievances. US policymakers must take into account how and why a separate ethno-religious identity is constructed and implemented to achieve a particular aim. The powerful notion of "other" mobilizes general support and gives legitimacy to goals and grievances in the pursuit of a specific political goal: a separate, Islamic state. Studying constructed and implemented identities will help policymakers contextualize regional instability, political violence, terrorism linkages, and at the same time, improve relations, bolster institutional capabilities, and promote human rights.

However, the focus here will not be merely on the "who" and "why" questions. Exploring political and socio-economic grievances are indeed necessary and important in understanding political agendas and violent actions, as well as in the formulation of foreign policy. It is equally necessary and important, however, to explain how and why a separate ethno-religious identity is created and mobilized to reinforce political goals.

The "whys" of separatist movements and violence—the historical, territorial, political, and socio-economic grievances—are not the focus of this paper. It will be assumed that these groups have such grievances against the state and that there are other ethnicities and religions that co-exist within the countries. Rather, the focus will be on the "hows" of these movements—particularly how separate ethno-religious identities are constructed, and reinforced, as "others" in order to mobilize support for their causes, grievances, agendas, and, in most cases, violent actions against the state and other non-members.

UNDERSTANDING ETHNO-RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND GROUP MEMBERSHIP

During the period of European colonialism in Southeast Asia, indigenous insurgencies fought against foreign control of ancestral lands and cultural practices. However, this violence against the established government did not end with colonization, but continued after the creation of new and renewed independent states. On one hand, nationalist movements vied for a role in the emerging political processes and institutions of these new nation states. At the same time, however, ethno-religious minorities sought their own independence. They questioned state legitimacy and viewed it as another

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form of foreign domination. Governmental policies continued to be extractive and non-inclusive, leaving minority populations feeling further marginalized and disconnected. These new governments in Southeast Asia faced internal political challenges, especially from domestic minority groups. Despite the formal end of colonization, the separatist struggle persisted under a perceived continuation of foreign control.

Since the wave of independence swept Asia after World War II, much has been written on ethnic conflict, separatist movements, and violence against the state. And since September 11, 2001,[1] there has been a resurgence of literature, now with a terrorism focus. Who are they? What are their grievances? Why do they want to separate from the state? Why do they turn to violence and terror? What are US national security issues, and how should Washington formulate its foreign policy?

In Southeast Asia, three main separatist minorities are often studied: the Moros of the southern Philippines, the Acehenese on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia, and the Thai-Malay Muslims in southern Thailand. Their persisting grievances and pursuits of self-determination include disputes over ancestral land, socio-economic opportunity, and exclusion from participation in and lack of recognition by the state apparatus. Consequently, members within these minority groups often take up arms against the state.

However, the focus here will not be merely on the "who" and "why" questions. Exploring political and socio-economic grievances are indeed necessary and important in understanding political agendas and violent actions, as well as in the formulation of foreign policy. It is equally necessary and important, however, to explain how and why a separate ethno-religious identity is created and mobilized to reinforce political goals. Identity and ethnic affiliation are not the only root causes of conflict in the southern Philippines, the Aceh province of Indonesia, and southern Thailand. The rest of the story is unveiled through an examination of the creation and promotion of an ethnicized "other" on the part of the colonial powers, the newly independent governments, and even the separatists themselves. Each had their own political and economic goals that could be achieved more easily by framing conflict as ethnic in nature.

Distinct ethno-religious identities—Moro, Acehenese, and Thai-Malay—were constructed during the colonial period. In each case, formal, governmental policies, as well as informal attitudes, created an ethnic "other" that was perpetuated by the independent governments of the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand.[2] Moreover, this separate identity has been mobilized by the minority groups and separatist organizations in order to pursue their own political aims. "Otherness" is a powerful unifier and motivator from both perspectives.

From anthropologists to sociologists to political scientists, ethno-religious identity and group membership are heavily debated and well-explored subjects. How, and more importantly, why do people

identify with others as being of the same ethno-religious group? What are the salient issues that tie them together? Why does identity and membership matter?

The three prevailing schools of thought on the formation and identification of ethnic groups are primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism. For primordialists, ethnic identity and affiliation are based on ascriptive traits and innate givens, such as a common religion, customs, language, race, kinship, and assumed blood ties. Moreover, there is a psychological component to such affiliation; members have a shared sense of belonging. Through these kinship bonds, organization takes the form of tribalism, parochialism, or communalism. According to David Horowitz, "ethnicity is based on a myth of collective ancestry, which usually carries with it traits believed to be innate. Some notion of ascription, however diluted, and affinity deriving from it are inseparable from the concept of ethnicity."[3] In short, one is born into a specific ethnic group. Horowitz goes on to say, "It is nonetheless true that ethnic membership is typically not chosen but given."[4]

While acknowledging some kinship ties, instrumentalists see ethnic identification primarily as a rational choice by members—not an innate sense of belonging. As described by Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, ethnic groups are, in effect, interest groups that use ethnic symbols and common references to mobilize the people toward political aims.[5] The saliency of ethnicity here is one of self-recognition and strategic efficacy. It is a tool, an instrument, for social mobilization towards political goals.

Constructivists bridge the primordialist and instrumentalist theories. They believe that governmental and social institutions, as well as political processes, generate and shape ethnic groups. Institutions are the salient means for constructing ethnic groups, not pure ascription or rational choice. According to Shaheen Mozaffar, "institutional arrangements define the context for the construction of ethnicity as a basis of social identity and group formation," thus creating opportunities for formed ethnic groups to mobilize and effectively compete for social and political benefits as well as economic resources.[6]

Though already introduced, the "whys" of separatist movements and violence—the historical, territorial, political, and socio-economic grievances—are not the focus of this paper. It will be assumed that these groups have such grievances against the state and that there are other ethnicities and religions that co-exist within the countries. Rather, the focus will be on the "hows" of these movements—particularly how separate ethno-religious identities are constructed, and reinforced, as "others" in order to mobilize support for their causes, grievances, agendas, and, in most cases, violent actions against the state and other non-members. But, the ultimate political goal is an independent state, not necessarily sustained violence and terror. In considering US national interests in the formulation of policies to improve

relations, bolster institutional capabilities, and promote human rights, it is important for policy makers to understand the context of regional instability, political violence, and terrorism linkages.

IDENTIFICATION AS MORO, ACEHENESE, AND THAI-MALAY MUSLIMS

As social creatures, identification and group membership are powerful concepts that contribute to our sense of belonging in a particular ethnicity, culture, and religion. The theories of ethno-religious identification already introduced will help explain how these identities were constructed during the period of colonialism and then used after independence to achieve the political goal of self-determinism.

Islam in Southeast Asia

According to Vincent Houben, "Islam is more than a religion; it is a „way of life‟ that encompasses all areas of human activity, private and public, ranging from the theological to the political."[7] Southeast Asia, a rich and diverse region, is home to the highest number of Muslims in the world. In Indonesia and Malaysia, Muslims constitute large majority populations. In the Philippines and Thailand, they are small, but distinct, minorities.

Islam made its presence in the region as early as the thirteenth century, first arriving in northern Sumatra, the island closest to South and Southwest Asia.[8] Persian, Arab, and Indian traders, teachers, and missionaries spread their religion as they moved along the established sea lanes in the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal, and the Malacca Straits.[9] Muslim traders demonstrated their beliefs through commerce conducted under Islamic law. Missionaries shared Islamic teachings and traditions with the populace.[10] Southeast Asian belief systems ranged from various manifestations of animism and ancestor worship to formal Buddhist tradition. Islam became a syncretic cultural alternative to the diverse peoples of the region.

Moreover, there was a level of economic, social, and political prestige associated with Islam. Muslim traders dominated commerce in the region. Both Sumatra‟s Aceh region and the Malayan port of Malacca[11] transitioned from small fishing communities along the Straits to significant trading hubs and centers of Islamic scholarship.[12] Islam was also a very powerful political ideology, particularly appealing to rulers, kings, and chieftains. Islam legitimized and reinforced their rule. By co-opting Islamic titles, such as sultan and Deputy of Allah, they elevated their stations not only above the rest of the populace, but also over other princes. In addition, these monarchs and chieftains became part of the larger umma— the Muslim community—that spanned the entire continent from Southeast Asia to Europe.[13]

By the time the Europeans began to travel, trade, and settle in Southeast Asia, Islam was already well-entrenched, particularly in the ports and islands along the Malaccan Straits in present day Indonesia—especially Sumatra and Malaysia. As the first wave of Europeans appeared, Islam was also spreading to new parts of Asia, extending farther inland into insular Malaysia and parts of Thailand. It

also stretched to new islands, particularly in the Philippines, first establishing itself in the south on—Sulu and Mindanao—but eventually reaching throughout the Filipino archipelago as far north as Luzon. However, with the Spanish colonization of the Philippines, most Filipinos were successfully converted to Catholicism—except in the unconverted south where Islam remained well-entrenched.

Southeast Asian Islam has taken on distinct characteristics, distinguishing it from the rest of the umma. Early on, Islam was blended with syncretic local traditions and customs to include elements of animism. Moreover, because many Muslims viewed European expansion as a continuation of the Crusades—especially since Christian conversion was state supported—Islam provided a strong base of identity and political will against foreign domination.

Exploring Primordial Ethnic Identity

Religion is not the only salient characteristic of culture and identity. Primordialists deem other ascriptive traits and innate givens as the basis of ethnicity and affiliation. Racially, the Moros, Acehenese, and Thai-Malays can be traced to the same indigenous stock, not only with each other, but also with much of the Southeast Asian population. They represent a mix of primarily Filipino and Indonesian aboriginal pygmies and Malays who, starting in the third century, migrated not only inland throughout insular Malaysia and parts of Thailand, but also to the surrounding archipelagos of present day Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Initially, cultures and tribal organization were very similar throughout Southeast Asia. Each village established a chieftain as the local leader and based its social structure on personal or kinship ties. Although the major language group was similar throughout the Malayan archipelago, the language of daily communications was localized and varied from village to village. Before Islam came into the region around the thirteenth century, the population practiced mostly animism, a polytheistic belief system based on spirits in nature and ancestor worship. Buddhism was more prevalent in Thailand and parts of Malaysia and Indonesia than in the Philippines.

The Moros, or Muslim Filipinos, are geographically concentrated in the southern islands of Mindanao and Sulu, an estimated 20 percent of that region''s population, whereas, they are only 5 percent, approximately four million people, of the total population of over 87 million[14] in the Philippines.[15] Moros are further subdivided into separate tribes based one geography, language or dialects, and even customs and practices. The main tribal groups are the Magindanaos of the Cotabato region, the Maranaos of the Lanao provinces, the Tausugs in Jolo, and the Samals of Sulu.[16] Several other larger ethic groups[17] make up the rest of the archipelago''s population. At 28 percent, the largest is the Tagalogs who are located in the north, particularly on the largest island of Luzon on where the capital city of Manila is located. While predominately Roman Catholic, Christianity as a whole is practiced by ninety percent of the population.[18]

Lastly, while Christian Filipinos have racially mixed with the Spanish, Chinese, and Americans during the colonial period, many scholars assert that the visual cues of ethnicity—like skin, eye, and hair color as well as height—between Muslim and Christian Filipinos are virtually indistinguishable.

Aceh province, located at the northwest tip of Sumatra, was once known as the Gate of Mecca, not only due to its proximity to the birthplace of Islam, but also due to its importance as a center of Islamic spiritual scholarship and development—much like Malacca.[19] Even today, Aceh is well known for its religious conservatism and strong Islamic tradition. Like the Moro area in the Philippines, Aceh is also rich and diverse. While 88 percent of Indonesia's 242 million people are Muslim, 96 percent of the Acehenese are Muslim.[20] Distinct tribal groups in the region include the Gayo and Alas in the highland areas, the Tamiang in Aech Tamiang, the Aneuk Jamee in Aceh Selatan and Aceh Barat Daya, the Kluet in Aceh Selatan, and the Simeulue of Simeulue Island.[21] Despite most of the local population being Acehenese, there are also many people of Arab descent, the result of trade routes and the spread of Islam.[22] The Javanese make up the largest ethnic group at 45 percent of the population.[23] Given that the capital city of Jakarta lies on the island of Java, they also dominate the political system.

In Thailand, the predominant religion is Buddhism, with only 5 percent of the country's 65 million people being Muslim.[24] And, like in the Philippines, the Muslim population is geographically concentrated in the south—particularly in Pattani,[25] close to the Malaysian border. Thai-Malay Muslims are also racially different from the rest of the largely ethnic Thai population.[26] Although they live in southern Thailand, they are predominantly Malay, both in ascriptive traits and cultural traditions.

While there are distinct practices within smaller tribes and communities, primordialists as a whole can recognize similarities in race and cultures throughout Southeast Asia. For instance, Edward Kuder claimed, "racially, physically and linguistically [Moros] are undoubtedly Filipinos. When dressed alike, it is next to impossible to tell Moro from Christian Filipino."[27] Thus the primoridalist definition prevailed until foreign influences from both Islam and European colonialization caused the notion of ethno-religious identity and group membership to germinate.

Constructing a Separate Ethno-Religious "Other"

The primordial explanation is, however, of limited value in the explanation of why ethnic conflict arises. Although simple differences in ethnicity and culture do not preclude violence, it is the operationalization of "otherness"—constructed identity different not only from the state, but also from other groups within the state—that leads to conflict. This is where the primordialist definition stops and constructivism begins. Distinct ethno-religious identities were not solidified until the advent of colonialism. Indeed, what unifies all these separate Muslim tribes is dar al-Islam, membership into the world of Islam. But the greater Moro, Acehenese, and Thai-Malay ethno-religious identities have also

been reinforced by the political, economic, and social institutions and processes of the colonial governments. Excluded from the newly-formed governments of post-colonial Southeast Asia, each of these groups constructed a separate ethno-religious identify, one forged not just by the Muslim minority, but also perpetuated by the state government.

Geographic concentration and devotion to Islam made it easy for colonial administrations to construct the Moro "other." Since Islamic settlements and sultanates predated the European presence in Southeast Asia, the Muslim population had laid claims to ancestral homelands on Mindanao and Sulu. With their arrival in the mid-sixteenth century, Spanish colonizers sought to convert the archipelago to Catholicism. They were very successful throughout most of the islands, except those the south where Islam was deeply entrenched. Once the Spanish consolidated their control over Luzon, they created colonial policies designed to isolate and disenfranchise Muslim Filipinos from the political and social processes.

American administration of the Philippines after 1898 further exacerbated ethnic saliency and continued the consolidation of the Moro "other." As described in the recent United States Institute for Peace (USIP) *Special Report on the Mindanao Peace Talks*, Aijaz Ahmad identified key factors behind the quick success of American—in contrast to the three hundred years of Spanish—subjugation of the Moro population. First, the Americans had sophisticated weaponry, as well as the ability to concentrate forces effectively. Second, the Americans secured their power by focusing administration at the municipal and district levels. And third, large groups of landless Christian Filipinos were encouraged to move south and set up communities in the Moro homelands.[28] It was clear to the Muslim population that government policy was geared toward assimilating them into the Christian majority. By doing so, Moros soon became the minority in their own ancestral territory. Furthermore, the percentage of Moros residing in the south plummeted from 98 percent to 40 percent of the population in less than fifty years.[29]

Even the independent Philippine Republic was seen as another foreign colonizer. The transmigration policies continued, and more Christian Filipinos settled south, both driving out and breeding out the Moros. Government policies alienated the minority population and exacerbated the differences between the Christians and Muslims. Moreover, uneven, extractive economic policies that benefited industries in the northern Philippines increased the disparities between Catholics and Muslims and further fueled local perceptions of alienation and deprivation. As T. J. George wrote in 1980, "Two decades after the Philippines became independent, Muslims in Mindanao were a devitalized people, their economic conditions stagnant, their social conditions in jeopardy, their laws and customs in danger of disintegrating."[30] It is against this socio-political and economic backdrop that the separatist Islamic insurgency in the southern Philippines has been fought since 1971.

Despite the creation of the "other" through governmental policies, the Moros embraced their constructed identity. After Philippine independence, the Moros used their ethnicized "otherness" to mobilize for their own political aims. With the creation of the ethnic "other," tension and violence arose between the Moros and the central governing body.

Like the Philippines, Indonesia was colonized by Europeans powers, first the Portuguese, then the English, and Dutch. The island chain was ripe for trade with its natural resources, abundant supply of spices, and immediate access to the established sea lanes. The Aceh province played a particularly important role in the colonial period. As one of the most powerful and wealthy sultanates, it maintained its sovereignty and trading status during the five hundred years of European expansion. But in 1873, the Dutch invaded the region and engaged in a thirty-year war in which 10,000 colonial troops and over 100,000 Acehenese died. By 1908, the Dutch had defeated the Acehenese.[31] Resistance against the European powers in the region continued until the end of World War II, and soon after, Indonesia gained its independence. In its attempt to consolidate its control over Aceh and preserve national unity, the Javanese government included the region in the newly-independent state.[32]

No sooner than an independent Indonesia emerged, the struggle for self-determinism began. The Acehenese believed they were a distinct people with their own history and culture, and they rejected forced incorporation into this created nation state. Indonesia was an artificial construct by the Javanese, another foreign entity to maintain power and continue extraction and exploitation of the resource-rich province. The Acehenese strengthened their notion of "other," reinforcing the ethno-religious differences between themselves and the Javanese government. Largely of Arab descent, the Acehenese were ethnically and culturally distinct from the Javanese, Sundanese, and other minority groups in Indonesia. Moreover, they adhered to a more conservative practice of Islam different from the secularized government. After all, this once powerful sultanate was a center of Islamic scholarship.

Chalk‟s 2001 article on separatism in Southeast Asia outlines four major reasons for this separatist identity and overall dissatisfaction with the Javanese government.[33] First, there has been a widespread perception among the Acehenese that they had not benefited from the region‟s vast wealth and resources. The island of Sumatra as a whole is one of the world‟s largest producers of natural gas and petroleum, rubber, coffee, tobacco, timber and paper, gold, platinum, steel, cement, rice, and sugar.[34] And, although the Acehenese comprise only 2 percent of the population, they contribute 11 percent of the national revenues—chiefly from oil production.[35] Moreover, development projects have primarily benefited the Javanese and not the indigenous populace. Second, mirroring the sentiment of the Moro population, Jakarta‟s transmigration policy has been viewed as suspect, "a thinly veiled attempt to impose Javanese social, cultural, and economic domination" in the region. Third, the Acehenese, who are devout Muslims, have also rejected the secular orientation of the state. And fourth, and as Chalk notes, probably

the most important factor over the last decade, there has been much bitterness and resentment towards the Indonesian military, whose presence in the province has been seen as repressive. Actions of the military in East Timor are not far from anyone‟s mind.

These reasons exacerbated the notion of a separate ethno-religious minority group. The Acehenese were clearly different and distinct from the predominately Javanese state as well as the rest of the Indonesian population. The "other" was constructed and fortified by governmental policies and informal attitudes of the majority.

The ancient region of Pattani was an independent kingdom before its conquest by Siam in 1786. Like Malacca and Aceh on the coast, Pattani was an important trade center, particularly for the established land routes. Through commerce, missionaries, and general travels, Arabs, Indians, and other Asians introduced Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam to the region. Islam was successful in converting much of the population, including the king. He declared Pattani as an Islamic state in 1457, and Islamic scholars controlled society and politics.[36] Surrounding areas to the south of Pattani also embraced Islam, whereas Siam to the north was predominantly Buddhist.

After conquering Pattani in 1786, Siam abolished the Muslim kingdom and subdivided the area into several provinces, as Syed Serajul Islam explains, "for administrative purposes as well as to weaken Muslim power."[37] During the European colonial presence, the Pattani Muslims were further marginalized. Although Siam was not formally colonized, many scholars and historians would claim that it was a semi-colony of Great Britain—or at least was in its sphere of influence. Britain recognized and supported Siam‟s sovereignty over Pattani, allowing Bangkok to implement various measures and legislation targeting Muslim identity and practices. One such action was the government‟s abolishment of Sharia law in favor of Siamese laws. Another action mandated secular education and instruction in Thai, thus closing down local Islamic schools.[38] Additionally, during World War II, the passage of the Thai Customs Decree forbade "the wearing of sarongs, the use of Malay [Muslim] names and the Malay language."[39] These harsh measures further solidified the Pattani as a separate ethno-religious identity. They were neither Thai nor Buddhist but Muslim Malays conquered by a foreign power that destroyed their history, culture, religion, and practices. The Malay Muslims of Pattani were never fully integrated into Buddhist Thailand.

Resentment and violence against the Thai state began as early as the late eighteenth century. Further anger and insurgencies were fueled with each new law and each new measure that suppressed Muslim Malay identity. Muslims rejected secular education, the Thai Customs Decree, and other marginalizing legislation the government passed. By the 1940s, and with the end of World War II, separatist moments began to pursue their political agendas, armed with historical grievances and a separate ethno-religious identity.

The notion of ethno-religious identity is fluid throughout the history and people of Southeast Asia, spanning primordial and constructivist analyses. The kinship ties and cultural bonds cleaved under colonialism constructed and exacerbated the ethnic "other" through institutions and policies. Furthermore, after independence in the region, the Moros, Acehenese, and Thai-Malays used their ethnicized "otherness" to mobilize for their own political aims. With the creation of the ethnic "other," tension and violence arose between the minority groups and the central governing body. Ethnic conflict, political violence, and terror tactics today in Southeast Asia are not the result a long-standing primordial hatred, but the result of hundreds of years of constructed identity.

MOBILIZING "OTHERNESS": SEPARATIST MOVEMENTS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST THE STATE

Although the ethno-religious "other" was constructed during the colonial period and perpetuated after Southeast Asian independence, identity as "other" was also embraced and utilized by the Moros, Acehenese, and Thai-Malays in order to highlight their socio-economic grievances, promote their separatist agendas, and achieve their political goals. Chalk's comprehensive look at Islamic separatist movements in Southeast Asia explores how identity and "otherness" is mobilized by these armed separatist movements.

As Chalk outlines, the Moros operationalized their ethno-religious "otherness" into a separatist agenda due to four main factors. First, there was resentment over Christian migration into what Moros considered to be ancestral homelands and the subsequent relegation of Muslims. Second, the Moros were unwilling to subscribe to and participate in the secular governmental system. Third, Manila ignored socio-economic development and infrastructure support in the Muslim areas. And fourth, there were internal fears that cultural and political traditions would be weakened or destroyed by forced assimilation into a Catholic-dominated Philippine Republic.[40] Three separatist movements emerged out of Philippine independence because the new government largely adopted many repressive colonial policies—the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). The latter two groups still remain active in the southern Philippines.

Organized political campaigns for Moro right to self-determination began in the late 1960s. Muslim students emphasized their unique ethno-religious identity, cultural traditions, and history, distinguishing it from Christian Filipinos and the government in Manila. These early student-led movements banned together to create the MNLF, headed by Nur Misuari, a professor at the University of the Philippines.[41] This newly-formed nationalist organization pursued an independent Moro nation, Bangsamoro—the Moro Homeland—through armed insurgency against the oppressive state.

In September 1972, Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in order to restrict the growing Moro nationalist insurgency. A recent USIP report claims that from 1972 to 1976, the

military and civilian death toll reached 120,000. Additionally, almost one million people living in the southern Philippines were displaced.[42] This was a very violent and unstable period.

 Instrumentalizing their religious identity, the MNLF sought and obtained formal recognition from the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)—the main representative body for Muslims in the Philippines. Additionally, the OIC helped negotiate a cease-fire agreement between the Moro nationalists and Manila.[43] In December 1976, they signed the Tripoli peace pact, establishing Moro autonomy over thirteen provinces and nine cities in the southern Philippines.[44] However, not everything was reconciled by this accord, and disagreement over implementation led to further discord and violence for the next two decades. However, in 1996, a final peace settlement was reached. Manila granted the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), an area to be administered by members of the MNLF.

Before the 1996 peace settlement and during its insurgency against the state in its quest for a Bangsamoro, the MNLF began to factionalize. In 1980, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) split off due to fundamental, ideological differences. While the MNLF focused on a more nationalist agenda, the MILF remained rooted in more religious goals, "emphasizing the promotion of Islamic ideals rather than the simple pursuit of Moro nationalist objectives."[45] For the MILF, a separate Moro state cannot be void of Islamic law and ideology, a point on which the MNLF was willing to compromise. MILF leader, Hashim Salamat, claimed that the organization's main political goal is "the creation of a separate Islamic state in all areas where Muslims still exist as a majority in the southern Philippines. The essential purpose of this polity, to be known as the Mindanao Islamic Republic (MIR), is to establish a system of government that upholds and applies Shariah law in all aspects of daily life." Moreover, Salamat promoted Islamic preaching along with jihad—holy war and armed struggle—to meet this political objective.[46]

Another armed separatist group emerged from the splinter within the MNLF. The Abu Sayyaf Group—the "Bearer of the Sword"—is considered the most radical and violent of the main separatist movements. While its political goal of a separate state is similar to its counterparts, the ASG seeks to establish an exclusive Islamic Theocratic State in Mindanao (MIS).[47] Another main difference of the ASG is reversion to widespread violence. Targeting all Christian Filipinos living in the south, bombings, kidnappings—some for ransom—and beheadings are pervasive. This fundamentalist insurgent group advocates armed struggle in a global jihad, an ideology different from that of the MNLF or MILF.

Although Indonesia became independent after World War II, internal political violence did not stop. But what makes this separatist movement unique is that unlike in the Philippines and Thailand, Indonesia was already predominantly Muslim. In the early 1950s, amidst armed rebellion led by Daoud Beurueuh,[48] the Acehenese began to form political organizations seeking to reestablish an independent

Islamic state. And in 1959, Jakarta deemed Aceh a "special region" and awarded it some degree of autonomy in cultural and religious affairs, including Islamic law.[49]

However, general disillusionment with the central government grew with accusations of corruption, neglect, and other practices that violated the tenets of Islam. According to Chalk, this sense of dissatisfaction was exploited by hard-line separatists to justify a general call to arms.[50] These hard-liners formed the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), or Free Aceh Movement. Their goal was an independent Islamic Aceh state and "full justice for all those who have been attacked, oppressed and raped by the Dutch and the Indonesians."[51] At first, the GAM lacked popular support since most Acehenese were amenable to autonomy rather than independence. But in the late 1980s, GAM elevated its rebellion by garnering external support and training, particularly from Libya. Common targets of violent operations were soldiers and police, particularly locally based troops and paramilitary.

These series of attacks led to a backlash from Jakarta, which temporarily terminated Aceh's special status and established the region as an Operational Military Zone. To maintain peace and stability, the government gave the Indonesian military "a virtual free hand to crush the rebels with all means possible."[52] Jakarta portrayed the Movement as terrorists. Reports show that the military regularly and successfully employed draconian measures to stop the insurgence. This reaction only fueled more hostility towards the government, and in the mid-1990s, GAM and its separatist aims received widespread support from the general Acehenese population and even religious leaders. Well over 90 percent agreed with the goal of independence.[53]

Pressures mounted on both sides to establish a cease-fire agreement and reestablish Aceh as a special region. In January 2002, special autonomy legislation was implemented, including dress and appearance. Muslim men could not wear shirts which exposed their midriffs nor wear shorts that did not cover their knees; Muslim women had to cover themselves fully except for their faces, hands, and feet.[54] Sharia law was also implemented two months later. In December of 2002, GAM and Jakarta signed the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Geneva. However, the new year brought new challenges to the fragile cease-fire. According to Kipp, from the Indonesian perspective, the Acehenese should have been satisfied with their granted level of special autonomy. However, the GAM viewed this so-called autonomy as a territorial, economic, and political foothold by the government.[55] Thus, violence continues in Indonesia.

While many have studied the Moros and Acehenese, less is understood about the separatist movements in southern Thailand, a dangerous vulnerability in the literature since growing insurgencies and violence are occurring in this region. Chalk explores the two main militant groups operating along the Thai-Malaysian border.

The first one is the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO), the largest of the Malay Muslim groups active in the region. Organized in 1968 by Kabir Abdul Rahman, a disillusioned Islamic scholar, the group's ideology is based on "Religion, Race, Nationalism, Homeland, and Humanitarianism," also known as "Ugama, Bangsa, Tanach, Air, and Perikemanusiaan" (UBANGTAPEKEMA). Its goal is political recognition and secession.[56] Instrumental to the ethnic identity, the PULO seeks to improve the educational standards of Thai-Malays and foster nationalism and political consciousness.[57] To meet these political ends, as well as draw attention to the struggles of the Malay Muslims, Chalk notes that this group sanctions violence—including bombings and arson—against the state and the symbols of Thai repression, including government buildings in the south, Thai schools, and Buddhist temples.[58]

The second group active in southern Thailand is actually a recent faction of the PULO. Established in 1995 by Ar-rong Moo-reng and Hayi Abdul Rohman Bazo, the New PULO seeks to achieve Pattani self-autonomy. According to Chalk, due to limited operational and human resources, this group engages in mostly minor attacks intended to repeatedly harass local government authorities and attempt to enhance the perceived legitimacy of the separatist Islamic struggle.[59] Chalk notes that the Thai Interior Ministry claims that the "New PULO relies on young drug addicts to carry out many of its more rudimentary sabotage missions."[60]

While in the past the two main separatist groups had not worked together, the PULO and New PULO set aside strategic differences, formed Bersatu—or solidarity—combined resources, and coordinated campaigns under the code name Falling Leaves. Their targets were government employees, law enforcement officials, school teachers, and other symbols of Thai Buddhist cultural dominance. According to Tony Davis, this coordinated violence marked the most serious upsurge of Muslim separatist activity since the early 1980s.[61]

Why do constructed and instrumentalized identities even matter? The answer is yet another piece in understanding the bigger questions. Why are there armed separatist movements? How do they mobilize against the state for a specific political agenda? We cannot ignore the power of identity and "otherness"—this pervasive "us versus them" tool. Identity can transcend disagreements and factionalism to bring a discordant populace together, united, towards a cause.

CONSTRUCTED IDENTITIES AND US FOREIGN POLICY

How does understanding the construction and instrumentalization of identity help policy makers and decision makers? Because merely recognizing the political, social, and economic grievances of various subnational groups does not suffice. There is a missing critical element. In studying ethnic conflict, separatist movements, and armed insurgencies, it is important to understand the complete story—

not just who they are and why they turn to violence, but how they define who they are and utilize this notion of membership and identity to mobilize towards political goals.

Now, how has understanding the construction of "other" changed in light of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)? In short, it has not. This analysis is especially salient in the battle against transnational terrorist groups and militant insurgents in Southeast Asia. The focus has to be on what leads groups to employ terrorist tactics, not just on the terrorist acts themselves. While the Moro Muslim movement, ASG, has been designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the US Department of State, not all separatist groups in Southeast Asia are considered terrorists or are targeted in the GWOT—particularly, the MILF, GAM, and Thai-Malays. However, there are known links to transnational FTOs such as al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiya (JI). Adding a GWOT discourse to understanding separatist groups does not preclude a clear understating of "who" and "how."

For much of the 1990s, Southeast Asia has been cruising below the US political radar. The 1991 the closures of American military installations, including Clark Airbase and Subic Bay Naval Base, strained US-Philippine relations for over a decade. Anti-American rhetoric was pervasive in much of Southeast Asia. In addition, the region was not receiving the level of strategic, anti-communism attention it once held during the Cold War. Numerous acts of terror and violence in Southeast Asian countries prior to 9/11 were regarded as local uprisings and insurgencies. Unlike the Middle East, the region was not considered a major center of transnational terrorism.[62]

Since the events of 9/11, there has been a clear shift in Washington's focus on international terrorism. The *National Security Strategy of the United States* (*NSS*), the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (*NSCT*), and the Department of State's annual *Patterns of Global Terrorism*—all three, key government documents—outline and publicize the Bush administration's top goals and priorities in the GWOT. US goals in the war on terrorism are many:

- Defeat terrorists and their networks, deny them sponsorship, support, and sanctuary, and diminish underlying conditions in which they can survive, thrive, and spread.
- Secure and prevent future terrorist acts against American citizens and interests at home and abroad.
- Forge and strengthen relations with other states in order to combat international terrorism and prevent attacks.
- Assist states in bolstering their capacities to fight terrorism.
- Promote and emphasize international cooperation in key areas, such as border security, information sharing, and improved legislation.
- Promote and ensure political freedom, open societies, and democratic institutions along with economic development, opportunity, and growth through free markets and free trade.

- Defuse regional conflicts by building international relationships and institutions to help manage local crises.
- Champion aspirations for and respect of human dignity and rights.

Moreover, 9/11 has reshaped perception of the terrorist threat in Southeast Asia, culminating with the rise in international terror groups and the Bali bombing. If the Middle East is the front line of the war on terror, then Southeast Asia is considered the second front. According to Rommel C. Banlaoi, the region is vulnerable to terrorist penetration because of its porous borders, weak law enforcement capabilities and governmental institutions, and its ties with the United States and other Western states.[63]

As "countries of convenience,"[64] Southeast Asian nations, particularly the Philippines, have been breeding grounds for international terrorist cells and radical jihadists. For instance, intelligence sources unearthed evidence linking organizations within the Philippines to Osama bin Laden"s al Qaeda network. Al Qaeda had been using the country as a major planning bed for many international acts of terror. It was reported that Muhammad Jamal al-Khalifa was directed by his brother-in-law, bin Laden, to recruit Muslim Filipinos to fight against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Supposedly, the MILF sent thousands to Afghanistan to train and fight.[65] Since then, Filipino radicals have been training in al Qaeda-run camps and returning to the Philippines with renewed vigor and expertise.[66] Furthermore, they have forged bonds of comradery with other, non-Filipino radicals and jihadists, who in turn have come to the archipelago to hide, train, organize, and plan.

It was also reported that Ramzi Yousef, the al Qaeda ringleader of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, used the Philippines to plan the Bojinka plots. Included in the plans were the assassination of the visiting Pope John Paul II in Manila as well as the bombing and/or crashing of eleven American airliners into various significant landmarks, including the World Trade Center and the Pentagon—an eerie precursor to 9/11.[67]

In addition, al Qaeda is reported to have funneled money, weapons, and training to local Muslim extremists, including the ASG.[68] In Aceh province, the GAM has benefited from Libyan arms and training, as well as financial backing from Malaysian militants interested in the region"s geography and access to the Straits of Malacca.[69] External support of the PULO and New PULO can be traced to radical militants in northern Malaysia, close to the Thai border. These Malaysian insurgents provide safe haven and ideological support.[70] There is also speculation of further cooperation with Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan, Iran, and Iraq.[71] Moreover, law enforcement and intelligence reports raise concerns of a possible Islamic militant ring operating in the region, spanning from Pattani to Aceh to Mindanao.

If some of these separatist movements are not targeted as FTOs, then why are they linked to al Qaeda and JI? There may be several reasons. The first is ideology. Al Qaeda and JI are Islamic fundamentalist organizations with a distinctly religious orientation in both identity and agenda. This

belief system can become a shared identity through affiliations with outside entities that help legitimize and expand the religious "other."

Another reason is training and expertise. Many Southeast Asian Muslims trained in international insurgent camps, especially in Afghanistan during the civil war in the 1980s. This connection leads to another reason for linkages of transitional terrorist organizations—a sense of brotherhood and comradery extending from shared training, expertise, and ideology.

Yet another reason for links to the two organizations is simply money. Transnational terror organizations have money and weapons and are willing to fund violence against a state that suppresses ethno-religious identity and agendas. Thus, understanding the factors that encourage separatist movements to network with transnational FTOs—as well as the differences between their agendas—is vitally important to US foreign policy.

Foreign policy goals must be melded with a comprehensive understanding of these armed separatists movements—who they are, what their socio-economic grievances are, and how they construct and mobilize ethno-religious identity towards a political objective of either independence or further autonomy. There are many foreign policy goals in Southeast Asia, based on the *NSS*, *NSCT*, and *Patterns of Global Terrorism*.

One goal is to eradicate terrorists, their networks, and their activities in Southeast Asia. The United States must end terrorism and FTO presence in the region. This includes severing the ideological, personal, and financial ties between separatist movements and transnational terrorists.

Another goal is to secure and prevent future terrorist acts against American and Southeast Asian citizens and interests. This requires multilateral cooperation in key areas, such as border security, information sharing, improved legislation, and law enforcement. To achieve this goal, governments, militaries, and police agencies must communicate, cooperate, and coordinate both domestically and internationally to bolster counter-terrorism capacity. Because of its vulnerabilities to piracy, drug trafficking, and terrorism, the Malacca Straits is a target of international concern and an area where such multilateral efforts will be required.

It is also important to strengthen bilateral relations with the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand. Relations have clearly strengthened with Manila. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, a close and personal friend of President Bush, was the first in Asia to pledge support for US action in Afghanistan. She offered access to Philippine airspace and to former American military installations, Clark Airbase and Subic Bay Naval Base. Deploying combat troops and humanitarian relief, she declared, "The Philippines stands together with the United States and the community of nations in a common effort to contain and to destroy terrorists and their global networks."[72] In return, President Bush assured that "[t]he Philippine

government is strongly committed to defeating terrorists operating in its own part of the world. The United States is committed to helping when asked."[73]

The reception in Bangkok and Jakarta, however, has been less than warm. Although supporting actions in Afghanistan, Indonesia did not agree with military actions in Iraq. And, Thailand—although privately granting the US military access to its airspace and bases—has been less than open about its support of the United States.

Another important foreign policy goal is to promote socio-economic development within the region. Foreign policy should address the problems that, if left unattended, become the roots of separatist grievances within the region. In actuality, these development woes go beyond the separatist agendas—socio-economic development is critical for regional stability and growth.

It is also in the foreign policy interest of the United States to assist the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand with conflict resolution by encouraging peace talks and non-military means of resolving conflict. Washington must realize that it will not always play the lead role in such negotiations. For instance, while the United States is openly supporting the process, Malaysia has assumed the lead fostering MILF-Manila peace negotiations.

Finally, foreign policy should champion the protection and respect of human rights in the region. Lastly, but just as importantly, foreign policy must continue to foster and enforce the protection of individual rights, not just from violent non-state actors but also from governmental agencies, such as the military and police.

This exploration of the nature of ethno-religious identity and construction of an "other" merely scratches the surface of understanding ethnic conflict and political violence at large. There are other important questions policy and decision makers must ask. How does the notion of a constructed "other" play into insurgencies and separatist movements in other parts of the world? Is this a created clash of civilizations? In any case, understanding the construction of a separate ethno-religious identity and how it assists in achieving political objectives is another piece in the large puzzle of conflict and terrorism studies.

ENDNOTES

1 Also referred to as 9/11.

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5 Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, introduction to Ethnicity: Theory and Experience (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 7.

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7 Vincent J. Houben, "Southeast Asia and Islam," The Annals of the American Academy no. 588 (July 2003): 149.

8 Barbara Watson Andaya and Yoneo Ishii, "Chapter 4: Religious Developments in Southeast Asia, c. 1500-1800," in The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia Volume Two, From c. 1500 to c. 1800, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 169.

9 Ibid., 170.

10 Ibid., 169-70.

11 Also spelled Melaka.

12 Andaya and Ishii, "Religious Developments," 172-3.

13 Ibid.

14 CIA, World Factbook (2005), http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/.

15 United States Institution of Peace (USIP), Special Report 131 (January 2005).

16 Alunan C. Glang, Muslim Secession or Integration? (Quezon City: R.P. Garcia Publishing, 1969), 7; and Peter G. Gowing, Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979), 2.

17 Ethnic group percentages in the Philippines are Tagalog-28.1 percent, Cebuano-13.1 percent, Llocano-9 percent, Bisaya/Binisaya-7.6 percent, Hiligaynon Ilonggo-7.5 percent, and Bikol-6 percent. CIA, World Factbook.

18 Religious group percentages in the Philippines are Roman Catholic-80.9 percent, Evangelical-2.8 percent, Iglesia ni Kristo-2.3percent, Aglipayan-2 percent, other Christian-4.5 percent, and Muslim-5 percent. CIA, World Factbook.

19 David Smock Special Report 15—Applying Islamic Principles in the Twenty-first Century: Nigeria, Iran, and Indonesia, (Washington D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, September 2005).

20 Religious group percentages in Indonesia are Muslim-88 percent, Protestant-5 percent, Roman Catholic-3 percent, Hindu-2 percent, Buddhist-1 percent, and other-1 percent. CIA, World Factbook.

21 Wikipedia Online, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page, s.v. "Aceh."

22 Ibid.

23 Ethnic group percentages in Indonesia are Javanese-45 percent, Sundanese-14 percent, Madurese-7.5 percent, coastal Malays-7.5 percent, and other-26 percent. CIA, World Factbook.

24 Religious group percentages in Thailand are Buddhist -4.6 percent, Muslim-4.6 percent, Christian-0.7 percent, and other-0.1 percent.

25 Also spelled Patani.

26 Ethnic group percentages in Thailand are Thai-75 percent, Chinese-14 percent, and other-11 percent.

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29 Ibid.

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32 Ibid.

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42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
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45 Chalk, "Islamic Factor," 248.
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48 Gee, "Islamic Law," 28.
49 Ibid.
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51 Ibid., 255.
52 Ibid.
53 Gee, "Islamic Law," 64.
54 Ibid.
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60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 246.
62 Rommel C. Banlaoi, The War on Terrorism in Southeast Asia (Quezon City: Strategic and Integrative Studies Center, 2003) 16.
63 Ibid., 17.
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65 Rommel C. Banlaoi, "The Role of Philippine-American Relations in the Global Campaign Against Terrorism: Implications for Regional Security," Contemporary Southeast Asia 24, no. 2 (August 2002): 300.
66 Abuza, "Militant Islam," 11.
67 Banlaoi, "Philippine-American Relations," 301.
68 Brian Nichiporuk, "Regional Demographics and the War on Terrorism," RUSI Journal 148, no. 1, (February 2003): 26.
69 Chalk, (Islamic Factor), 243.
70 Ibid., 245.
71 Ibid., 246.
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